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Research Note

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MONTANA CHRISTMAS TREE EXPORTS CONTINUE DECLINE

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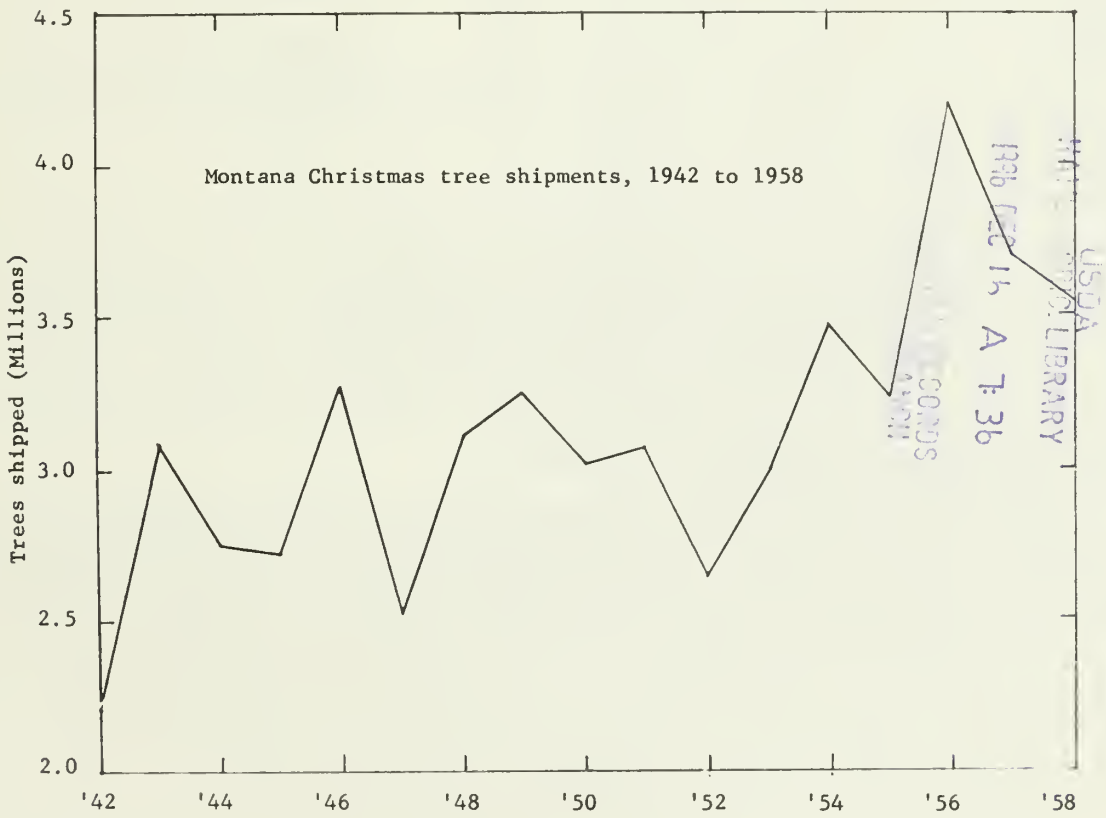
Montana Christmas tree shipments reached an all-time high in 1956, declined sharply in 1957, and continued to decline in 1958 but at a less rapid rate. Even so, 1958 was the third highest year since records were started in 1942. Nearly 3.6 million trees were shipped from the State[1/] in 1958. Since



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1/ This report is concerned with Christmas tree exports only; it is not a survey of total Christmas tree production. Data on rail shipments were furnished by all railroads operating in Montana, and data on truck shipments were furnished by the State Forester, the University of Montana, the U.S. Customs Service, and the national forests. An estimated 5 percent of the State's exports, consisting of unreported truck shipments, is not included in this report.

this was only 4 percent fewer trees than in 1957 (compared to an 11 percent decline in the preceding year), the 2-year decline shows signs of leveling off which may foreshadow a new upswing.

Table 1.--Shipments of Christmas trees by rail and truck from Montana, by counties, 1958

County	Rail shipments	Truck shipments	Total	Percent
	- - - - - - Thousands of trees - - - - - -			
Lincoln	855	109	964	27
Flathead	850	98	948	26
Missoula	285	438	723	20
Sanders	200	144	344	10
Lake	275	16	291	8
Lewis and Clark	0	144	144	4
Mineral	5	18	23	1
Others	0	131	131	4
Total	2,470	1,098	3,568	100
Percent of total	69	31	100	

Although shipments from Lincoln and Flathead Counties decreased 14 and 17 percent respectively from their 1957 levels, these two counties were still the undisputed leaders. However, Lincoln County displaced Flathead for the top position for the second time in the past 10 years. Missoula County, which has held third place for 9 of the past 10 years, increased its shipments 12 percent above their 1957 level. These three leading counties supplied 73 percent of Montana's exports.

In 1957, the spruce budworm epidemic seriously reduced Christmas tree exports from certain areas. The same insect was still active on Douglas-fir in the same areas in 1958, and additionally a needlecast fungus has been observed to be especially active on Douglas-fir over parts of its range. Since the majority of the Christmas trees produced in Montana are Douglas-fir, both the insect and disease attacks caused some reduction of tree shipments in 1958.

Table 2.--Comparison of rail and truck Christmas tree shipments from Montana, 1942-1958

Year	Rail shipments		Truck shipments		Total shipments
	Thousands of trees	Percent	Thousands of trees	Percent	
1942	2,139	97	65	3	2,204
1943	2,931	94	172	6	3,103
1944	2,636	96	120	4	2,756
1945	2,556	94	168	6	2,724
1946	2,867	87	432	13	3,299
1947	2,210	88	306	12	2,516
1948	2,731	87	392	13	3,123
1949	2,817	86	440	14	3,257
1950	2,693	89	325	11	3,018
1951	2,784	90	301	10	3,085
1952	2,375	90	270	10	2,645
1953	2,389	79	631	21	3,020
1954	2,760	79	723	21	3,483
1955	2,855	88	380	12	3,235
1956	3,349	80	847	20	4,196
1957	2,631	71	1,089	29	3,720
1958	2,470	69	1,098	31	3,568

Rail shipments declined still further, percentagewise, in 1958; they were only 69 percent of the total--the new low point for the railroads' share of shipments. Truck shipments were above the one million mark for the second time on record.

Trees exported by rail went to 29 states in 1958. As in previous years, several carloads were shipped for export to Cuba and Hawaii. Among the 10 leading market states, Texas, which has led in 5 out of the last 10 years, was in the lead again. Although California was not among the first five market states as recently as 1954, within the last 3 years it has competed strongly with Texas for the top position and actually held first place in 1957.

Christmas tree imports from Canada reached a record high of nearly 158,000 trees in 1958, but no clues are afforded as to whether the increased imports were to compensate for depressed Montana output due to insect and disease conditions or are simply another manifestation of the fluctuations of a rather unstable industry.

Table 3.--Rail shipments to leading markets for Montana Christmas trees, 1958 and 1957

State	1958		State	1957	
	Thousands of trees	Percent		Thousands of trees	Percent
Texas	399	16	California	404	15
California	337	14	Texas	347	13
Missouri	271	11	Missouri	294	11
Oklahoma	242	10	Oklahoma	261	10
Iowa	209	8	Iowa	247	10
Kansas	209	8	Illinois	185	7
Illinois	161	7	Kansas	171	7
Nebraska	123	5	Nebraska	161	6
Louisiana	90	4	Louisiana	109	4
Florida	47	2	Arizona	62	2
Others	382	15	Others	390	15
Total	2,470	100	Total	2,631	100

Table 4.--Christmas trees imported from Canada to Montana, 1946-1958

Year	Total trees imported	Percent of total shipped
1946	107,570	3.3
1947	89,944	3.6
1948	67,664	2.2
1949	54,050	1.7
1950	39,288	1.3
1951	72,036	2.3
1952	99,918	3.8
1953	99,055	3.3
1954	123,076	3.5
1955	125,603	3.9
1956	137,015	3.3
1957	46,809	1.3
1958	157,738	4.4